

8 SHORT-TERM USE AND LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

This section discusses the short-term use of the environment and the maintenance of its long-term productivity. A more detailed discussion of impacts and resource utilization associated with this project is presented in Chapter 4. For this EIS, *short term* refers to the period of construction, the time when the largest number of temporary environmental impacts are most likely to occur.

The project area subject to short-term use would be limited to the applicants' proposed power line routes and alternatives. Work areas and pull sites would be needed during the erection of towers, monopoles, and crossover structures, and during the stringing of the conductors. None of the routes analyzed would cross cultivated land; thus, no agricultural lands would be taken out of production. Some prime farmland, not currently used for agriculture, could be affected if the proposed transmission lines were built along the western alternative route. However, construction would occur in the Yuha Basin ACEC and the Yuha Basin Management Area (habitat for the flat-tailed horned lizard), and the natural environment would be disturbed over the short term. Land clearing and construction activities would disperse wildlife and temporarily eliminate some habitats, although mitigation measures should prevent the loss of individual organisms belonging to species of concern. Long-term reductions in biological productivity are possible in some temporary work areas, since the effects of disturbance tend to be more pronounced in arid lands, such as the project area, where biological communities tend to recover slowly.

The transmission lines and associated access roads and spurs would have only limited effects on the long-term productivity of the natural environment, because of the relatively small area they would occupy and limited use of the area by maintenance and monitoring personnel. Effects of long-term occupancy by the transmission lines would include negative encounters between humans and wildlife, such as mortality resulting from maintenance or unauthorized recreational vehicles. The impact of these effects would be greater along both the western and eastern alternative routes than along the applicants' proposed routes. A transmission line with associated access roads already exists along the proposed routes, and new impacts would be fewer. Access roads constructed along the alternative western and eastern routes would increase ease of access to the ACEC, which would likely increase human pressure on this critical habitat.

The generation of power associated with the transmission lines using wet cooling would result in long-term use of water. Over the long term, the amount of water flowing in the New River as it reaches the United States and flowing out of the New River into the Salton Sea would be diminished, although the amount of decrease would be within normal flow fluctuations. Since the plants would treat the water before discharging it into the New River, there would be long-term beneficial reductions in biological pathogens, TSS, BOD, COD, and phosphorus in the river as it flows into the United States. However, while the TDS and selenium loads would be reduced, because of the reduced volume of water, there would be an increase in salinity and in the selenium concentration over the long term in the New River, the Brawley wetland, and the Salton Sea. The reduction of nutrient loads entering the Salton Sea would have a small but beneficial effect on biological resources. That effect would be negligible, however, in

the long term, as the Sea's salinity would continue to increase and would overwhelm these short-term benefits. If current trends continue, the Salton Sea will be unable to support aquatic resources in about 36 years.